

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An automobile collision warning system, comprising:
a sensor system configured to generate a sensor signal corresponding to at least a first sensed object in the vicinity of the automobile;
a processor coupled to the sensor system, wherein the processor is configured to determine if a potential collision risk exists based on the sensor signal and to generate a corresponding collision warning signal; and
a turn signal inhibition apparatus coupled to the processor and configured to inhibit movement of a turn signal stalk in response to the collision warning signal, to thereby warn an automobile operator of the potential collision.
2. The automobile collision warning system as defined in Claim 1, wherein the turn signal inhibition apparatus inhibits movement of the turn signal stalk in a first direction when the potential collision risk is on the right side of the automobile, and wherein the turn signal inhibition apparatus inhibits movement of the turn signal stalk in a second direction when the potential collision risk is on the left side of the automobile.
3. The automobile collision warning system as defined in Claim 1, further comprising a first fixture coupled to the turn signal stalk, the first fixture having a receiving area configured to receive a portion of an actuator activated in response to the collision warning signal.
4. The automobile collision warning system as defined in Claim 1, wherein the turn signal inhibition apparatus prevents the movement of the turn signal stalk.
5. The automobile collision warning system as defined in Claim 1, wherein the turn signal inhibition apparatus increases the effort needed to move the turn signal stalk.
6. A method of warning a vehicle operator of a potential collision, comprising:
receiving a sensor signal corresponding to at least a first sensed object located to one side of the vehicle;
determining, based at least in part on the sensor signal, if a collision risk exists;
generating a collision warning signal at least partly in response to determining that the collision risk exists; and

inhibiting activation of a turn signal indicator at least partly in response to the collision warning signal.

7. The method as defined in Claim 6, wherein the collision warning signal is further generated at least partly in response to vehicle speed.

8. The method as defined in Claim 6, wherein the act of inhibiting activation of the turn signal includes preventing movement of a turn signal stalk.

9. The method as defined in Claim 6, wherein the act of inhibiting activation of the turn signal includes preventing movement of a turn signal stalk in a first direction when the potential collision risk is on the right side of the vehicle, and preventing movement of the turn signal stalk in a second direction when the potential collision risk is on the left side of the vehicle.

10. The method as defined in Claim 6, wherein the act of inhibiting activation of the turn signal includes activating an actuator that physically engages a turn signal user-accessible control.

11. A vehicle collision warning system, comprising;

a processing system configured to determine if a collision risk is present based on a sensor signal and to selectively generate a collision warning signal at least partly in response to determining that a collision risk is present; and

an actuator that receives the collision warning signal and at least partly in response, inhibits movement of a turn signal control.

12. The vehicle collision warning system as defined in Claim 11, further comprising a sensor that generates the sensor signal, wherein the sensor is coupled to the processing system.

13. The vehicle collision warning system as defined in Claim 11, wherein the actuator includes a solenoid that mates with a receiving apparatus coupled to a turn signal stalk, to thereby inhibit movement of the turn signal stalk.

14. The vehicle collision warning system as defined in Claim 11, wherein the actuator selectively inhibits movement of the turn signal control in at least one of an upwards and a downwards direction.

15. The vehicle collision warning system as defined in Claim 11, wherein the actuator inhibits movement of the turn signal control by increasing the force needed to move the turn signal control.

16. A vehicle, comprising;

a sensor system, including at least a first sensor positioned to monitor objects on the vehicle's left side and the vehicle's right side, and that generates at least a first sensor signal corresponding to at least a first sensed object in the vicinity of the vehicle;

a processing device coupled to the sensor system, wherein the processor determines that the first sensed object is in the vicinity of the vehicle based on at least in part on the first sensor signal and is configured to generate a corresponding turn signal inhibition signal at least partly in response to determining that the first sensed object is in the vicinity of the vehicle; and

an actuator coupled to the processing device, the actuator configured to inhibit movement of a turn signal control at least partly in response to the turn signal inhibition signal, to thereby notify a vehicle operator of the first sensed object.

17. The vehicle as defined in Claim 16, wherein the sensor system includes at least one of a radio frequency radar, a laser radar, and an imaging camera.

18. The vehicle as defined in Claim 16, further comprising a mounting apparatus coupled to the turn signal control and a steering wheel column.

19. The vehicle as defined in Claim 16, wherein the actuator includes at least a first solenoid used to prevent the turn signal control from being moved in a first direction and a second solenoid used to prevent the turn signal control from being moved in a second direction.

20. The vehicle as defined in Claim 16, wherein the vehicle is one of a car and a truck.

21. The vehicle as defined in Claim 16, turn signal control is a stalk movable in an upwards direction and a downwards direction.

22. A turn signal system, comprising:

a turn signal stalk; and

an actuator configured to selectively inhibit movement of the turn signal stalk in one of an upwards direction, a downwards direction, and in both the upwards and downwards direction.

23. The turn signal system as defined in Claim 22, further comprising a fixture attached to a steering column, wherein the turn signal stalk is mounted to the fixture.

24. The turn signal system as defined in Claim 22, wherein the actuator includes a first device that selectively prevents the turn signal stalk from being moved in the upwards direction, and a second device that selectively prevents the turn signal stalk from being moved in the downwards direction.